
SECOND WESSEX

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**SECOND
WESSEX**

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
EDITORIAL	2
AN OLD ENGLISH CALYPSO	<i>by K. R. Brooks</i> 4
THE INTERPRETER	<i>by D. Palmer</i> 6
ASPIRATION	<i>by Mary V. Austen</i> 9
SPRING SINGERS	<i>by Mary V. Austen</i> 9
DIALOGUES IN A DRY LAND	<i>by R.E.Y.</i> 14
THE ROBIN	<i>by F. Walhouse</i> 16
RIVER SONG	<i>by F. Walhouse</i> 17
RANDOM THOUGHTS ON A VISIT TO THE PAST	<i>by C. Cooper</i> 18
BLINDNESS	<i>by J. Fulton</i> 20

EDITORIAL

THE contents of "Second Wessex" are usually assembled in a leisurely fashion over several months. This magazine, however, has been hastily gathered together during the last few weeks since we were told that the Students' Union had at last agreed to pay for an edition. Several of our contributors would have liked to look over their articles again, and we apologise to them for snatching the articles so rudely from their hands. Two editions of this magazine a session are the minimum in our opinion, and we hope that next year's editors will have the courage to attempt three editions. An early publication of a magazine not only uses up material, but stimulates readers to write things for the next one. The effect is cumulative.

Rightly or wrongly, we have been turning more and more to essays written as part of a student's course. Some of these essays, we know, are of quite a high standard and would interest a large number of people not doing the same course. Many students, particularly finalists, have so much studying to do for examinations nowadays, that they have no energy left for writing articles for this magazine. Others do not feel sufficiently expert in subjects outside their course to attempt a special article. We beg all these people not to hesitate to submit their best work to us, since it gives us material to choose from.

We should be especially interested in essays written by science students and, if necessary, would be happy to advise them on how to make their technical terms comprehensible to the general reader. As long as the writer presents his subject in an interesting way, he need not be startlingly original. Arts students need to come to terms with science just as much as science students need to enter the world of the imagination sometimes. This magazine should reflect the interests of all the students in this university, not a tiny fraction of them.

We welcome whole-heartedly the formation of an English Society. We already have an English Association to which anyone living in Southampton may belong, and which organizes many outside talks. The English Society, however, provides an opportunity for any students interested in literature to meet informally over coffee, and to exchange ideas on agreed topics. The need for such a society has been felt for a long time, and its present members hope that many students outside the English Department will attend in the future. The first two meetings were very lively and friendly, and we wish the society every success in the future.

Finally, we should like to thank all contributors to both editions of "Second Wessex" very much indeed. We should also like to thank G. F. Wilson & Co. Ltd., for their patient co-operation in the printing of the magazine.

RUTH YELLAND.

AN OLD ENGLISH CALYPSO

King Hrothgar built a hall, and it was mighty grand;
Its fame spread far and wide throughout the Danish land.
They sang and played the jazz at every royal feast,
And that's how they got hated by a great brute beast.
His name was Grendel—Gr-r-r-rendel;
His origin would puzzle Doctor Mendel.
He heard that Rock-'n-Roll from his aquatic lair;
It made him sore, 'cause he was just one doggone square.

So on the prow he came up to the Hall at night,
And gave King Hrothgar's bodyguard a ghastly fright;
For of the sleeping Danes he butchered thirty men,
And afterwards devoured them in his secret den.
His name was Grendel—Gr-r-r-rendel;
His origin would puzzle Doctor Mendel.
He did this every night for twelve long years or more,
And nobody could drive him from the palace door.

Now in the Geatish land there lived a warrior bold;
He had the strength of thirty men, as I've been told.
And when he heard the news, at once he put to sea,
To join King Hrothgar's army as his A.D.C.
His name was Beowulf—great thundering Beowulf—
He feared no dragon, fighting man or werewolf.
King Hrothgar asked him in, and said, "You're welcome here
To fight in our defence; sit down and have some beer!"

Then Unferth spoke his mind, and he was full of rage;
He thought that in this drama he should hold the stage.
"If you attack this beast, he's sure to lay you flat;
You lost the Swimming Trophy of the Kattegat!
Don't fight with Grendel—Gr-r-r-rendel;
He's been the death of Swede and Dane and Wendel!"¹
The hero then replied, "See here, my friend, you're drunk;
Say, cut it out, you poor gosh-darned two-timing punk!"

Now when the night came down, the Danes departed all,
And Beowulf stood as sentry in the palace hall.
His men were all asleep, and that was mighty tough;
Alone he had to catch the brute and treat him rough.
He watched for Grendel—Gr-r-r-rendel,
*Tha wearth beholen thaere sunnan trendel;*²
At last the monster came, broke down the iron door,
And muscled in on Hrothgar's tessellated floor.

¹ i.e. Vandal.

² When the globe of the sun had become hidden.

Then Beowulf gripped him tight, and that's when Grendel found
That he had met his Waterloo; for miles around
A mighty noise was heard, and Grendel gave a shout :

"They've got me on the spot at last—I can't get out !"

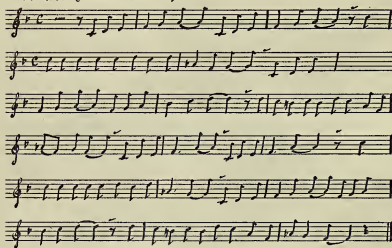
The fight titanic, with rage volcanic,
Threw all the listening Danes into a panic;
Then Grendel's arm came off, and so the hoodlum died—
The jury called it justifiable homicide.

Next day the Danes rejoiced to see their foe was dead,
And to the hero Beowulf noble Hrothgar said :
"Say, listen, Ecgtheow's son, we're mighty proud of you;
Come on and join the Danish Royal Barbecue !"

He creased that Grendel—Gr-r-r-rendel,
And liberated Swede and Dane and Wendel;
And that's how Beowulf's name came down to history,
For bumping off that bum in 509 A.D.

K.R.B.

Not too fast (about 35 bars per minute).



THE INTERPRETER

OF COURSE, most of them were called Ali. There were only three known by another name; only three, too prominent to be anonymous, too important, in their way, to be confused with the rabble of dark-skinned Arab labourers who worked slowly and silently, as if protesting against their fate, the heat and the flies, in the power station, the gardens, and the N.A.A.F.I. They had all endured Mussolini and seen innumerable farmers and shopkeepers return, as poor as they came, across the Mediterranean, leaving behind them stunted orchards and decaying villas, with here and there a café and a bar where a dark Latin beauty dispensed *il vino* to the unfledged brood of Manchester and Newcastle, Ilkley and Bethnal Green.

There was Michael and Rais and Mahfud. Michael, industrious and honest, managed the camp laundry to which, while the morning was still fresh and the pitiless sun hid behind the bare walls of the mosque, came the shy company of blanket-robed, impersonal *blanchisseuses*. One night, eluding sentries and piards, those large but gentle desert dogs that roam in darkness, thieves entered the *dhobi* and Michael was ruined. There were those who maintained that Michael was implicated; you just can't trust a wog, they said.

Rais was the overseer of native labour. Riding a bicycle, bearing an officer's stick and a badgeless British officer's S.D. cap, it was his peculiar pleasure to be saluted every week by the latest draft of pallid and lonely recruits from England. Unkempt and unpressed, forever nervously smiling, his appearance was a caricature of the traditional cavalry officer, and perhaps the ironic contrast afforded him—a sovereign in the village and a lackey in the Regimental Office—satisfaction in the audacity of his mute comment on European pretensions. No one doubted that he swindled his underlings, but while he was scrupulous in his dealings with the British military authorities he was just ridiculed or—as far as possible—ignored.

Mahfud was the interpreter. He was the eternal go-between, explaining their duties to the docile petitioners for employment and receiving instructions from every new master. As no regiment stayed in Sabratha for long—a tour lasted three years and the ——— Dragoon Guards languished there for seven years only as a punishment, it was said, for some obscure misdemeanour—Mahfud had to adapt himself to many varieties of the petulance by which imperialist nostalgia may express itself. And although his "cockiness," his self-important fussiness, his evasiveness and plaintiveness were often resented, yet as long as no one but an archæologist was expected to learn Arabic he was unexpendable and had to be tolerated. Intelligent, ambitious and sensitive, it was his destiny to live on the edge of the Libyan desert, fifty miles from the nearest town, isolated from the natives by his pride and rebuffed by strangers because of his race.

In a land where the peasant diets his donkey with the bran intended for the destruction of locusts, where a wheatfield is a patch three paces across in the middle of a sandy waste, where a beautiful Arab child will draw a knife to demand three piastres and utter such obscenity as only British soldiery could teach him, where a Roman colonial town with forum and theatre still gazes gravely northwards from the cerulean shore and reminds every immigrant administrator of the transience of human greatness, in a land of holy men and Coca Cola signs, where the maps record with fidelity every known pile of jerry-cans in the *gebel*—on what bitterness did the soul of Mahfud feed, knowing itself suspended between two civilisations,

“one dead,
The other powerless to be born?”

We listened to his complaints, corrected his English translations and heard the spoken echo of his interminable day-dream of wealth. What a bore, we thought, when we were assured that he could reward our patience with no uncurrent piece of scandalous gossip. Why doesn't he go to Egypt or Tunisia where they take their politics seriously and the gift of the gab is appreciated? Hate the British if you please, but what would become of you, what would become of the entire economy of your tiresome country if we left for good? So we smoked and thought and waited for the camp cinema to open as soon as it was dark enough for an image to be seen on the open-air screen.

My last recollection of Mahfud is of one morning when with light hearts we were thinking of home. There was the usual queue of supplicants outside the C.O.'s office and the air was purer than usual with the almost forgotten smell of rain. Colonel Nasser was still respectfully regarded as an energetic reformer, France seemed to be disembarassing herself of her North African empire without undue bloodshed, and Glubb Pasha was still in Jordan. It was still possible to feel that we were viewed with awe in some parts of the Middle East and could teach a lesson in efficiency to lesser breeds without the law. There would always be a British garrison at Sabratha, and as for explaining our motives, why, Mahfud could do that for us. To keep a watch on the Canal, to guard an American air base, and more than that, to see poverty relieved and disease defeated, and the United Nations planning, irrigating, advising and subsidising the way to a prosperity that the Arabs could never have achieved alone. What appeal could Communist fanaticism make to a people so indolent, to whom we brought so many palpable benefits? The western way of life was justifying itself by actions louder than Russian propaganda.

Mahfud was trotting behind Lieutenant X, Intelligence Officer and Mahfud's immediate superior. Mahfud with a comical expression of overstrained anxiety, fluttering papers and expostulating with a timid

malignancy, doleful and insistent; Lieutenant X keeping just ahead of him and studiously giving his attention to other matters. What they were discussing, or rather what Mahfud was discussing, I never discovered. I just heard the suave Rugbeian intonation tremble with emotion as the lieutenant suddenly turned upon his subordinate.

"Listen Mahfud, I won't tolerate your bloody insolence!" The Arab was immediately abashed and apprehensive. Lieutenant X saw that he had an audience and measured his next words, caressed them almost, controlling his anger in the pleasing anticipation of crushing this impudent upstart forever.

"We have allowed you certain privileges here and now you are getting above yourself. When I say no I mean it and I won't be contradicted. Do you hear? If you're not careful you'll find yourself out on your neck. Just remember that you're only—an interpreter."

DAVID PALMER.

ASPIRATION

Man is an ostrich : he hides
His head in the sand of worldly pleasures,
Continually considering the ebb and flow of tides
Of ease and fashion.

But when the tide is high and touches
His brain's burial-place too closely,
He reluctantly removes his reason to clear air,
And either goes mad, kills himself, or turns "religious."

There are a few—perhaps more—it seems,
Who have found a happy medium and
Live sanely, head-in-air, without a mind that teems,
Like maggot-ridden carrion, with mortal fancies.

The key to their clarity of spirit? Something,
Somebody, greater than themselves, to
Live for, with, and through; plus
Expectation of extreme bliss after this life's phase.

I must discover it.

MARY V. AUSTEN.

SPRING SINGERS

The poets sing of life new-budding forth.
The old men sitting in the strengthening sun
Sing of their youth, their Spring of life.
The women, groping in dark cupboards
For the last cold jars of the old year's gifts,
Break through the dusty seals, and sing
In expectation of the gardener's success.
The children seeking for snowdrops—
Winter's messengers of white farewell—
Run singing of the primroses to come,
And golden promise of the summer sun.

All Nature sings ;
But I, the garden-toiler,
Urging the earth to render up her store,
Work on without a song; but—
Silence of my imperfect voice preserved—
Rejoicing in the rest more clearly heard.

MARY V. AUSTEN.

DIALOGUES IN A DRY LAND

I

"Father, why doesn't it rain?"

"There are no clouds of the right kind in our district."

"Why aren't there?"

"You had better ask the man at the meteorological office."

"Will he know why?"

"Only the gods know why."

"The gods must hate us if they do not send rain to save our crops."

"The gods do not hate us. They love us."

"The gods have no power to help us then?"

"They are all-powerful."

"Then why doesn't it rain?"

"How can we question the all-powerful gods? It is not good for us to have everything we want, and we shall have no harvest."

II

"Father, why are you sharpening your sword?"

"To protect you and your mother. To protect our village."

"Who would attack us?"

"The wild tribes from the north. They come nearer each day. They sacrifice to the Evil One and would make slaves of us all."

"Are we as strong as they are?"

"Yes, if we sharpen our swords."

"Then surely they will not attack us."

"They might do."

"What would happen then?"

"We should fight till no-one remained from either side. The villages would burn, the women and children perish."

"I am afraid I should rather be a slave."

"All men must die some time."

"But can men decide when they die? Only the gods must do that."

"They might not attack us if we are strong."

"But you are afraid they will."

"Yes."

"Then by fighting we should call down the wrath of the gods upon our heads. Surely we should not even prepare our weapons; then we shall not be tempted to fight, and our enemies will marvel at the gods we worship."

"If we do not prepare our weapons our enemies will rejoice at an easy victory. We should undoubtedly be their slaves."

"Would they make us worship the Evil One?"

"They would treat our people unjustly. They would cunningly spread lies among us. They would kill opponents to their rule."

"But could we still worship our gods?"

"If we obeyed our masters in every other matter,"

"Would they make us do evil?"

"Not unless we wished to be other than slaves."

"Then surely, if we choose to be slaves we shall not call down the wrath of the gods upon our heads. If we destroy our lands and people, we sacrifice them to the Evil One."

"Should I give up my wife and children to slavery without defending them? Should we let men do evil in our midst without opposing them? Only cowards accept a corrupt society."

"Are not all societies corrupt?"

"Our society is less corrupt than most."

"I cannot say. But is it true that the Holy One gave all men a perfect example of how they should worship the gods?"

"That is true."

"Did he ever use force against his enemies?"

"He did not."

"Then how should we presume to do so?"

"The Holy One is perfect. Ordinary men cannot be."

"They should try to be."

"Yet surely we can intimidate our enemy by preparing for battle without defending ourselves if actually attacked."

"How can we threaten battle without meaning it? That is acting a lie and sacrificing to the Evil One."

"It is surely better to do that than to suffer slavery."

"I shall follow the Holy One."

"And I shall sharpen my sword."

R.E.Y.

THE ROBIN

To the Artist—

The symmetry and easy flowing line—
 exquisite simplicity.
 Contrasting colours blending gaiety
 In a pattern of light and shade,
 harmonising brightness.

To the Zoologist—

Energy and vibrant life
pulsing pulmonary
Interacting sympathetic nerves with
Muscle, corpuscle, gland and sensory cell
amazing correlation.

To the Philosopher—

Object of an image of the mind, a
nonexistent entity
Of fading thought, complex ideas
In movement, size, solidity—
notion universal.

To the Christian—

Wholly pure and beautiful its
singing, rejoicing
In its maker and creator.
A creature part of love, life and eternity,
perfection.

F. WALHOUSE

RIVER SONG

A little boy laughed—

 and the river laughed too.
Laughed, glittered, rippled along

 Sunlight dappled with fleeting shadow,
Over the pebbles bubbling a song.

 Shimmering, glittering, movement life.

 The tiny trout leaping,

The willow tree weeping, drops fall in a circling pool.

A little boy stands—

 Minnow jar in his hands

The flash of bright kingfisher blue

The river's sparkling, chattering song.

A little boy's sleepy—

 the river is sleepy
Drowsy, drenched in hot sun.

 Slow flapping heron, time is endless.

Stillness, breathes peace just begun.

 Drowsily, dreamily, dragonfly hovers.

 Still, gliding graceful scene,

Sound of the lark's song, way up in the endless blue.

Little boy dreams—

 In his heart it seems
Is the ceaseless peace of the river song
The calm and murmuring river song.

The little boy wakes—

 in panic is running
The river has wakened too.

 Thunder cloud clapping, grey sleet lashing,
Lightning's vivid blue.

 Storm whipped river, swirling, struggling,

 The churning fury

The powerful glory, foaming, roaring, choking,

Clutching reeds—

 The strangling weeds—
Down, down, tumbling, terror, thunder swirling on,
Battering force of loud laughing river song.

still in the deep dark pools.

Down deep where the still water moves.

It is heard in the waters still.

In the blue of the sky, in the bubbling laughing water,

It is heard in the song of the river.

I entered then a village, the appearance and delightful inhabitants of which were very pleasing to me. The houses were grey, with red climbing-roses. A little church stood on a slight hill beyond. I entered the church and the coolness was a relief from the heat of the afternoon and my tiredness. A woman was washing the tiled floor, another had been renewing the altar flowers, and a mother and child were tending the graves outside. I was struck by the careful devotion of all to their church. And when one of the middle-aged women told me that the lord of the manor had paid the bill for the renovation of the floor, £300 it was, I felt myself transported fifty years backwards in time. They were holding fêtes now to try to pay him back. She was also sincerely worried that the pink fringe on a new altar cloth might not match the seasonal draperies. How would it go in Lent, she wondered.

Such painstaking and sincere people Hardy must have known and loved, and written into his works for eternity, as indeed I felt that they, their village and Dorchester so richly deserved.

C. E. COOPER.

BLINDNESS

We met upon an ebbing tide of life
And knowing not which way our course had been,
Or what of storms and calms our eyes had seen,
We hailed in tattered words: "a lovely day."

Then sudden ugly view of sightless eyes
Which I on such a day had pitied sore,
Came flitting unrequired from mem'ry's store
And caused me half regret the useless phrase.

For I, with countless nothings much employed,
Have passed where silver bright the water lay,
And listless swans pursued a listless way,
And seen them not as if I too were blind.

At once I stood engulfed within this world,
Where laughing streams are fathomless and cold,
And all familiar creatures terror hold,
When, sensing weakness, cowardwise they mock.

And stumbling on I heard a bitter voice:
"What use is beauty to a breathless age,
Which lets its sight become a yellowed page,
Where not a mark is clearly printed down."

J. FULTON.

Closer and closer rose the great fortifications described by Hardy as "an enormous many-limbed organism of an antediluvian time . . . lying lifeless, and covered with a thin green cloth, which hides its substance, while revealing its contours." The thrill of its nearness must be like that of the mountaineer's, as he approaches his huge objective. I passed herds of shorn, naked sheep, with bells hanging from their necks as from those of mountain goats. The notice by the wayside informed me that the land belonged to the Duchy of Cornwall.

I was aiming to enter Maiden Castle by its West Gate. This was the most elaborate of the two entrances. It has always been found that the entrance to a fortified place is its most vulnerable spot. To one's mind comes the care which the mediæval castle builders took to protect their entrances from attack. Here, great care had been taken for the same purpose, and the result is still impressive. Line after line of over-lapping, steep banks, and deep ditches would confront the invader of the first century B.C. A tortuous ascent would be necessary, and the inhabitants would have their sling-throwers stationed on platforms to meet the invaders at every turn of the banks. From the top of the final rampart one can see over these multiple fortifications rising one beyond the other like green unbroken waves.

The "Camp" is about 1,000 yards long and 500 yards wide. It covers the entire summit of the hill and around the whole area run three lines of great banks to protect the inhabitants. The neolithic settlers had occupied only the eastern end of the present camp, and a couple of thousand years later, iron-age man had constructed the present massive spectacle.

Why were such extensive ramparts needed? One may well wonder at this until one realises that the use of slings was the means of warfare at this time, approximately 50 B.C. The range of the missile was a hundred yards on the level, and more down an incline. Thus the inhabitants of Maiden Castle would have the enemy within their effective range, but the latter would have difficulty in retaliating successfully from the base of the outermost bank, assuming that they had managed to avoid the stones flung from there in the first instance.

The Romans, however, did manage to overpower the Belgic tribe which had succeeded the Veneti in Maiden Castle. They attacked from the less well defended eastern end, and conquered the Belgæ with much slaughter. One can see in Dorchester Museum a vertebra of a man, to which the now rusty point of a Roman spear is still adhering.

After the defeat of their enemy the Romans themselves occupied the camps, before constructing the bulk of Roman Dorchester. Part of a wall which they had built was the last notable object as I descended through the eastern entrance and made my way from the hill-top through a cornfield which had probably been cultivated for thousands of years.



